

Yamaha Motor Monthly Newsletter

January 15, 2015 (Issue No. 25)



The Core of Yamaha Motor

The Founder – Genichi Kawakami

Part 1: The Origins of Yamaha's Spirit of Challenge
and the Mission to Create *Kando*

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd. in 1955. Throughout its history, the company has strived to "Offer new excitement and a more fulfilling life for people all over the world" by creating value in wide-ranging fields through its *Monozukuri* and services, while aiming to be a "*Kando** Creating Company" that people always look to for the next source of this special kind of excitement and fulfillment. In this issue, we introduce Yamaha Motor's founder, Genichi Kawakami, the man whose vision gave the world the first Yamaha motorcycle—the YA-1—and laid the foundations that the company would be built on as its first president. Through a variety of illustrative episodes, we explore the achievements of his career and the man he was.

**Kando* is a Japanese word for the simultaneous feelings of deep satisfaction and intense excitement that we experience when we encounter something of exceptional value.

The Decision: A Musical Instrument Manufacturer Builds a Motorcycle

"Hey, did you hear? It looks like our company is gonna make a *pon-pon!*"
"Can an instrument maker even build something like a *pon-pon?*"
"I'm telling you, it's true! I hear we're gonna use the machining equipment that was used for making airplane propellers to do it."

Pon-pon is a local Japanese expression from the area around the present-day city of Iwata that people once used commonly to refer to a motorcycle. In 1950, only five years after the end of World War II, Japan was slowly but surely beginning to recover from the devastation and burned-out cityscapes left by the War, and the people were eager to build a new era of peace and prosperity. At the young age of 38, Genichi Kawakami had just succeeded his father as the fourth president of Nippon Gakki Co., Ltd. (presently Yamaha Corporation). "I have a clear responsibility as the head of the company's management to seek out and research the company's next business ventures and sow the seeds for them when we've achieved a certain degree of success and have the financial leeway to do so," he declared. Kawakami planned to make use of the metal machining equipment that had recently been returned to the company by the General Headquarters of the Allied Occupation Forces to start a new line of business. From among product ideas that included sewing machines and 3-wheeled automobiles, Kawakami chose to build a motorcycle.

At this point in Japan's postwar recovery, there were already about 150 motorcycle manufacturers large and small competing fiercely to establish themselves. Kawakami decided to send engineers to Europe to gather information about the state of the industry and products there. He made the decision knowing that the technological level of Japanese products at the time was good enough that the company could successfully carve out a place for itself even as a new entry in the industry.



To explore the possibilities of entering the motorcycle industry, Kawakami (right) sent two of the company's engineers on a study tour to Europe in 1954

Foresight: A Focus on Product Design

In the summer of 1953, prior to entering the motorcycle industry, president Kawakami took a 90-day study tour to places like the United States, Europe and Southeast Asia. In his words, "I thought I was well versed in the current state of affairs in the world from what I read in the newspapers and saw in movies, but I felt that not seeing things overseas with my own eyes would inevitably limit my perspective." The things



The YA-1 was praised as being an even more beautiful machine than the German DKW RT125 it was based on

Kawakami directly saw, heard and experienced in the cultures and values he encountered overseas, which were so different from those in Japan, would eventually be reflected in the new business ventures he initiated one after another.

One of his newly inspired areas of focus was design. For the pianos that were his company's biggest product, he initiated research into new types of lacquers and other measures, based on the belief that the completely black and box-like upright pianos they had been making seemed

outdated. For the company's new motorcycle venture as well, after it was decided that the base model for the company's first motorcycle would be the German DKW RT125, Kawakami immediately commissioned its design to a group of graduate students (who would later form today's GK Dynamics) led by an assistant professor of the elite Tokyo University of the Arts he knew through work with pianos. At a time when virtually every Japanese motorcycle was all-black and rugged in design to fully emphasize practicality, this commission produced a design that was sporty as well as beautiful, with a stunning maroon and ivory color scheme that utilized high-grade finish expertise borrowed from the company's piano manufacture: this led to the birth of the YA-1.

Then in 1957, Yamaha engineered and designed the YD-1 as the first Japanese motorcycle that was a complete original, with no foreign base model. After that, with continued success with distinctive designs for a growing number of models, the company came to be recognized for design excellence and the term "Yamaha Design" took root.

Passion: "If you are going to do it, try to be the best."

Kawakami strongly believed that as a new entry in the motorcycle industry, the company would need to manufacture products with better quality than any other Japanese motorcycle company. He invited a professor of engineering with extensive knowledge of 2-stroke engine technology to lecture to the Yamaha engineers. At the lecture, the professor's words were both steeling and inspiring: "If you are going to start [building 2-stroke engines] from scratch, expect it to take two years." Hearing this, Kawakami instructed his engineering team that "To work carefully is to work quickly" and that "If you are going to do it, try to be the best." Motivated by these words, the pace of work in the various aspects of the YA-1's development accelerated all at once.

In a mere two months from the start of development, the first YA-1 prototype was complete. President Kawakami personally test-rode it through the area around the city of Hamamatsu and praised the development staff's work, saying that its performance and handling were superior to the model it was based on. But of course, it would not enter production as it was. A second prototype was completed and a 10,000 km durability and endurance test was planned. Once again, president Kawakami himself rode one 65-km lap around Lake Hamana on the prototype to begin a month of rigorous and eventually successful testing.



Even after the YA-1 was released, Kawakami led a team of engineers on a tour to Mt. Norikura in Nagano Prefecture to evaluate its performance and durability, riding it for 300 km on rough and unpaved mountain roads

Later, in October 1954, the official application for product authorization and registration was submitted to the authorities. Then, in preparation for the YA-1's official product release and test-ride event in Tokyo, president Kawakami mounted prototype No. 7—with an engine that he had assembled himself—and set out from the company's headquarters in Hamamatsu with two other YA-1s. Riding to Tokyo through more than 250 km of wind and rain, the president not only made an impressive appearance at the release of the new "Yamaha 125 YA-1" but also proved the product's high level of reliability for the press in the process.

Challenge: Yamaha Motor's Founding and First Race Victory

The first production model of the YA-1 was finally completed in February 1955, and president Kawakami personally engraved its engine with the letters "No. 1." But, at

that time, his thoughts were already focused on preparations for the official founding of the new “Yamaha Motor Company” on July 1st of that year. Since he and his employees had put their all into the creation of this new motorcycle business, Kawakami surely had a fitting vision in mind: rather than remain as just a department of a musical instrument manufacturer, it should grow and reach new heights as an independent and specialized company under the same “Yamaha” brand name.

However, it was clear that a successful launch of Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd. would be no easy task. No matter how exceptional the YA-1 might be as a product, there was no way customers would purchase it if they knew nothing of its great performance or that it even existed. President Kawakami constantly pondered if there might be some revolutionary method in addition to grassroots sales efforts to quickly spread the word far and wide about the excellence of the YA-1 and “Yamaha motorcycles.” The answer he eventually arrived at was to enter the 3rd running of the high-profile Mt. Fuji Ascent Race on July 10th, just days after Yamaha Motor’s planned founding date.

The Mt. Fuji Ascent Race was one of the biggest motorcycle events in Japan at the time, attracting numerous spectators from all over Japan and press coverage by newspapers and magazines. A victory in this race would ensure high-profile publicity for the new company and its motorcycle. At the time it was decided to enter, there was just over a month until race day. For the quickly assembled team, race participation was an entirely new undertaking—they had absolutely no experience in racing. What’s more, president Kawakami had given them a decisive command: “If we are going to do it, we *must* win!” Gathering all the resources available, the Yamaha team worked night and day to give it their best shot—and the result was victory! In fact, it was an overwhelming team victory as well, with other YA-1 machines sweeping 3rd to 6th places as well as 8th and 9th place.

With this success, Kawakami ordered the team to set their sights next on the 1st Asama Highlands Race scheduled for November 5th. Here again, Yamaha and the YA-1 proved victorious, securing a clean sweep of the winner’s podium. Just as Kawakami had intended, these wins provided an exponential boost to the reputation and name value of the new manufacturer and its machine. At the same time, these victories provided tremendous motivation for the employees of the newly founded Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd. while contributing greatly to their technological prowess. In the process, racing became an established pillar of Yamaha’s corporate activities and culture.



The victory at the 3rd Mt. Fuji Ascent Race would mark the beginning of Yamaha’s long history of success in racing

Message from the Editor



Happy New Year! May this year be full of excitement and rewarding challenges for everyone. In this year's Newsletter, we will be bringing you contents that we hope will deepen your understanding of and spark new interest in the Yamaha brand.

The theme of the Newsletter for 2015 is "The Core of Yamaha Motor," and I hope you found this first issue interesting. It tells the story of the bold move of a musical instrument manufacturer to enter the motorcycle

industry, the early focus on the importance of product design, taking on the challenge of racing and more. The origins of the unique style of Yamaha Motor lay in the passion and Spirit of Challenge of one man and the people around him that shared his inspiration. As one of the more than 50,000 employees in the global Yamaha Motor family, I felt anew the passion in the early episodes related in this issue.

It really is impressive to see the power that comes from having a dream and sharing it with others. I hope you will join me in starting the new year with a dream you want to realize in the year ahead.

Ryoko Ota



Global PR Team, Corporate Communication Division, Yamaha Motor Co., Ltd.
2500 Shingai, Iwata, Shizuoka, 〒438-8501 Japan
TEL. 0538-32-1145 FAX. 0538-37-4250
E-mail: ootar@yamaha-motor.co.jp

***Prior to any use of the article(s) and photographs contained within this newsletter, please contact me.**